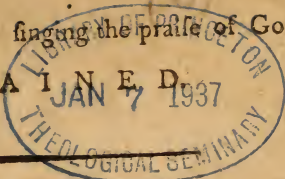


The duty of Christians, in singing the praise of God.

EXPLAINED



William A. Chambers

S E R M O N.

✓
BY JOHN BLACK,
PASTOR OF THE UPPER PRESBYTERIAN CON-
GREGATION OF MARSH-CREEK.

*Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in
his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests un-
to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion
forever and ever. Amen. Rev. 1. 5, 6.*

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# To the Reader.

*WHEN the following sermon was composed and delivered, the author had not the most distant intention, nor expectation that it would ever undergo the press. It was delivered on different sabbaths, that is, as two sermons, though composed as one: and the author had just the same simple intention in it, as in all his other ministrations to his flock, viz. to promote the cause of truth, piety and virtue among those to whom he ministers. Sometime after, he received the following address,*

*“ REVEREND SIR.*

*“WE the subscribers under your pastoral charge, having attended your discourses on psalmody, delivered at Upper Marsh-Creek, on the 14th and 21st days of September last: and being impressed with an opinion that the printing of the same may have an effectual tendency to remove prejudices and mistakes with regard to that subject, and convince honest enquirers of the necessity as well as propriety of introducing a system of psalmody more suitable to the gospel dispensation than that which we now make use of: it is therefore our earnest wish that you will, as soon as convenient, prepare a copy for the press, which will be gratefully acknowledged by us.”*

*This address was signed by a very respectable number of the author's congregation—and on receiving it, he concluded, it would be an instance of false modesty to refuse—The Notes were added since—and now the whole is submitted to the candid examination of the christian world.*

*If the cause of the truth as it is in Jesus, and the edification of his Body, the Church, shall, by this feeble essay, be advanced, it will rejoice*

*THE AUTHOR.*

*Marsh-Creek,  
February 17th, 1789. }*





ns(c); and in after times, when the church was more fully organized, a larger collection of such compositions was used in Divine Worship, formed chiefly by David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. Under the Gospel Dispensation, the duty of the church, and of individuals, in this, as in other respects, is still more clearly revealed. Christ the Lawgiver and pattern of his Church, sung an hymn with his disciples after he had instituted and celebrated the Ordinance of his Supper: and his Apostle expressly enjoins it upon all, not only in my text, as you have heard, but also in his Epistle to the Ephesians, in these words, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"(d). Moreover, comparing this passage with the text, it will appear, that *praising God* is an act of worship which should be performed both in public and in private: for as in the one we are commanded to teach and admonish one another, so in the other to speak to ourselves in psalms, hymns, &c.

BUT it may be enquired—Do all these expressions, *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, signify one and the same thing: and particularly, do they mean the Book of Psalms contained in the old Testament, exclusive of all others?

THE solution of this is of considerable importance:—And to it I answer, that these terms neither mean one and the same thing originally, nor have we any reason to conclude that they refer to any one system or collection of compositions whatever, which was extant in the Apostles days for praising God, and exclusive of all others.

THE word, *psalm*, originally means a composition of musical notes, tune, or air performed upon an instrument

(c) *Exod. 15 chap.* (d) *Ephes. 5. 18, 19.*

of music, and was not necessary to be accompanied with either words or voice. It is derived from a *root* which signifies, *to strike gently*, or move with a certain agitation; because the strings of musical instruments require to be struck or moved with the fingers, or other instrument for that purpose. David was finely skilled in instrumental music, as well as in poetry: and it is undeniable that throughout the Jewish Dispensation, especially in his time, instruments of music were used in the worship of God. On this account it was, that the compositions of David, and of others, which were used by the Jewish Church, were called *psalms*, because whilst the Choir and others sung the words, the musicians always performed the tune upon some instrument. Hence it is, that we find them directing their compositions to the musician, to be performed on such, or such an instrument. And hence also it is, that they so frequently call upon the church to praise God with timbrel, psaltery, harp, organ, &c.

A *hymn* is a poetical composition, or verses, made to celebrate some person, or action, or to bewail some mournful event; without any regard to music. It is designed to be read or recited; and although it may be accompanied with an instrument, or the voice, yet these are not necessary to its original design.

THE meaning of the term, *song*, is universally known—it is always designed for the voice—to be sung with an air suited to the measure of the verse. But the Apostle directs that the songs of christians should be of a particular kind, as to their subject matter, viz. *spiritual*; that is to say, songs on spiritual subjects—subjects calculated to give religious instruction, and to raise, or quicken devotion in the soul.

I WELL know there are many who suppose, that the Apostle, by all those various terms, meant nothing more, nor less than the Book of Psalms contained in  
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the Old Testament. But this is mere opinion: nor have I ever seen, or heard any thing in support of it, but opinion, or bare assertion.—There are no authentic records, sacred or profane, which prove that the psalms of David bore these various titles, or were denominated by them(\*). On the contrary, we know that

(\*) To be satisfied respecting the truth of this sentiment, the candid reader may consult those writers, antient and modern, who have treated this subject expressly, such as Theophylact and Hierom among the antients---Calvin and Edwards among the moderns. Their own opinions and conjectures or the opinions and conjectures of others equally destitute of authority, is all the evidence they produce to prove that the Apostle here means the psalms of David, exclusive of all others. And it is very observable, that, however they agree in this opinion, no two of them agree as to which of these compositions were called psalms, which of them hymns, which of them spiritual songs; nor why they obtained these different epithets. Hierom says psalms contain moral subjects which we ought to practise. In direct opposition to him, Dr. Edwards says, it is a term of great latitude, and is used for all those songs which contain in them the praises of God, and set forth his sacred attributes and perfections, and in any way express devotion, or contribute to piety and holiness. And Calvin, differing from both, alledges that these compositions which were accompanied with a musical instrument, were called psalms---Again, Hierom asserts that an hymn has for its subject sacred things such as we ought to contemplate and meditate upon. Dr. Edwards says that those compositions, which were more complete than psalms, were called hymns; being of a more singular and peculiar strain. And Calvin defines it thus, "a song of praise whether sung with a high voice or otherwise." Once more, Hierom concludes that spiritual songs belong to natural things which we ought to debate and discuss. Dr. Edwards explains them as being still more perfect compositions than even hymns; and as hav-  
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that whenever Christ and his Apostles quote that part of scripture, they do it under the title, *psalms*,—never *hymns*, or *spiritual songs*. Thus the Saviour quotes that book in the following passages, “As David himself saith in the book of psalms”(a). “All things must be fulfilled which were written concerning me in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms”(b). Thus also Peter, “For it is written in the book of psalms”(c). And thus too Paul, “As it is written

(a) *Luke* 20. 42.—(b) *Luke* 24, 44.—(c) *Acts* 1, 20.

ing for their subject matter the perfections of God as they respect us; flow from a spiritual frame; and to be sung with great emotion of spirit. And, still differing from these, Calvin says, that spiritual songs are such psalms as not only contain praises, but exhortations, and other arguments.

As vague and unsatisfactory is the conjecture of those who alledge, that the Apostle used these different terms in conformity to the Hebrew distinction of the book of psalms, by the terms *Mizmorim*, *Tchillim*, and *Shurim*. For, if it should be even granted, that such a distinction was authoritative and general among the Jews, yet neither will this prove that the Apostle meant the same thing; nor, indeed, do all the various and contradictory explications which are given of these words accord with his phrases. Some say the *Mizmorim* were psalms which treated of various subjects---others, that they were such as were attended with instruments. Some, that the *Tchillim* only mentioned the praises of God---others, that they were prayers generally sung. Some, that the *Shurim* were songs more artfully composed, and sung with the help of an instrument---others, that they were songs containing not only proper and immediate acts of devotion addressed to God, but also moral and religious instruction. Thus do these various and contradictory opinions, founded on conjecture and fancy, like the iron race of Cadmus, rise up and devour each other.

written in the second psalm"(d).—On the other hand, when the term *hymn* is used in the New Testament, there is no circumstance to make it so much as *probable* that the sacred writer had any reference to the book of psalms, or to any composition in it. The only places where the word is used, are my text—the fifth chapter and nineteenth verse of the Epistle to the Ephesians—and Marks and Mathews Gospels, where they record, that Christ sung an *hymn* with his disciples, after the institution and celebration of his supper(a). Now, in all these places, there is no one consideration from the scope of the context, or otherwise, to make it certain, or even so much as likely, that the Old Testament psalms were meant by it. Some, indeed, have alledged that what Christ sung, after the celebration of his supper, was the Jewish *Hallel*, beginning with the 113th and ending with the 118th psalm. But this is still *opinion*—an opinion, too, very slenderly founded: for the only reason assigned is, that the Jews always sung this portion of the psalms when they celebrated their passover feast. And surely it is very extraordinary reasoning, to conclude, that because the Jews sung *this on that occasion*, therefore the Saviour sung the same, when he had set that ordinance entirely aside, and had instituted a quite different one in its room.—It is just such reasoning, as if one were to say, the premises are *different*, therefore, the conclusion must be the *same*. Divine wisdom has not seen it fit to record particularly, what the Saviour sung on that occasion: but as he had then instituted a *new ordinance*, of which there is no hint in the Old Testament, I leave it with every one to judge for himself, whether it be not most probable that he himself composed the hymn he sung; especially, as none of the psalms directly apply to that ordinance; and especially, too, as the Evangelists

(d) *Acts* 13, 33.—(a) *Matt.* 26, 30. *Mark* 14, 26.

gelists, who record the transaction, call it, uniformly, *an hymn*.

UPON the whole,—as these *terms* originally signify different things—and as there is no *evidence* that the book of psalms, used by the Jews, ever obtained, or was known by these various titles; but that, on the contrary, indeed, the title, *psalms*, was appropriate to it: it will be obvious to conclude, that the Apostle did not, by all these *terms*, mean that book, exclusive of all others; nor, indeed, any one system, or collection of compositions then extant. The plain easy, natural, unsophisticated sense of the words is, *every kind of sacred poetry*, whatever denomination it might come under, whether psalm, or hymn, or spiritual song; and not only those which were then composed and in use in the Christian Church, but also those which, from the fulness of the word of Christ dwelling in believers, they might be enabled, from time to time, to compose for their mutual edification, and the glory of God.—And agreeably to this, I shall submit the following paraphrase of the whole verse, “ Let the word of Christ, the glorious Gospel,\* to the knowledge of which you have

\* When this discourse was composed, I thought it was not necessary to say a single word to prove that the word of Christ, signifies the Gospel, particularly; this sense of it being so obvious, so natural, and so agreeable to the uniform language of the New Testament. I find, however, since, that it has been interpreted as meaning the whole of Divine Revelation; with a view to strengthen the opinion, that the Apostle, by the terms, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, meant the book of psalms exclusively. Let it, therefore, be observed, that this phrase in the plain and native import of the words, has so express a reference to what God has revealed to us in these last times, by his SON, as distinguished from what he revealed by the Prophets under former dispensations (see Heb.

have been happily brought, and which discovers life and immortality, and all things pertaining to life and godliness with a fulness and clearness far surpassing all former revelations, dwell in you richly in all wisdom; treasure it up in your memory, let your understandings be plentifully stored with its precious contents, meditate upon it frequently, and improve it wisely; be often teaching one another its pure and holy doctrines, and admonishing one another concerning its duties; and that, not only in the usual way of sermonizing or prose discourse, but also, in all kinds of sacred poetry, whether

Heb. 1. 1, 2); that one should certainly have some very clear and unequivocal proof, before any other sense be admitted. None such, however, has been, and I presume, none such can be given. At any rate, it is no proof, to assert roundly that it means the whole of Divine Revelation; and then exercise the invention to find reasons why it may have, instead of proving that it actually has this meaning.—The truth is, not only the naive sense of the words, but almost innumerable parallel places, both in the context, and elsewhere, (compare, among many others, Mark 8, 38. Luke 9, 26. John 5 24, 8, 31. Acts 13, 26. Rom. 10, 8, 2. Cor. 5, 19. Eph. 4, 20, 21. Col. 1, 5. Heb. 2, 3,) prove, that such phrases always refer to the discoveries made under the Gospel, as contradistinguished from those made under the Jewish dispensation — consequently, that it is a mere arbitrary interpretation to extend it any further here. But suppose it should be even granted, that this phrase means the whole of Divine Revelation, yet this would not affect the doctrine exhibited in the following pages---for if it includes the Gospel discoveries at all, (which, I believe, is allowed by all) it will support what I plead for, viz. that our psalmody should contain these discoveries, otherwise we cannot, by it, teach them to one another, as the Apostle directs. But this will appear more fully in the sequel.

whether it may be called *psalms*, *hymns*, or *spiritual songs*, and whether already in use among you, or you may be enabled to compose hereafter, in agreeableness to the fullness and clearness of the Revelation which you enjoy. And content not yourselves with reading or reciting these poetical compositions, but accompany them with your voice—sing them to suitable airs; yet see to it that this external exercise be attended with grace in the heart—with souls attuned to the matter of the song; for as it is addressed to the Lord who knows every sentiment of the heart, it will not be acceptable to him unless accompanied with inward devotion.

WHAT I farther design, upon this occasion, is—to shew in what *manner* we should perform the duty of praising God—the *subject matter* of our praises—the *end* we should have in view when we praise the Most High—I shall also lay down some *principles* for the regulation of our conduct in reference to this important part of worship—and remove any difficulties, or objections which may seem to ly against what shall be said.

FIRST. With regard to the *manner* of performing this duty, I shall not trouble you with the controversy, whether instruments of music should be used in Christian worship, or not. Perhaps this is but a matter of doubtful disputation; and the propriety, or impropriety of it, may depend much upon the sentiments of the worshipping assembly. We certainly know it was practised under former dispensations, with the Divine approbation; and the New Testament does not forbid, neither does it command it. But this is certain, that we should praise God with the *voice*, in an *air* or tune adapted to the measure of the verse. The melody of the heart—the joyful frame of the spirit—or any inward exercises whatever, will not come up to the ordi-

nance, nor answer its end, without the sound of the voice. Nothing can be more evident than this, both from the Old and New Testament. Many are the places where David exhorts to sing to God; yea, to sing loud(a)—Christ and his Disciples sung(b)—all that followed him as he approached Jerusalem, just before his sufferings, sung his praise as they descended the Mount of Olives(c)—and the Apostle in my text, and in Ephesians 5, 19, commands to sing.

BUT although the sound of the voice is *necessary* to the performance of this duty, yet the exercise of *grace* in the heart, which the Apostle, elsewhere, terms *the melody of the heart*, is as necessary. For unless those devout affections and gracious dispositions that are correspondent to the subject, be awakened and in exercise, we shall only be drawing near to God with our mouths, and honouring him with our lips, whilst our hearts are far from him.

WE must also sing with *understanding* and *judgement*. This, indeed, is necessary in every part of religious worship,—The rational offspring of the All-intelligent Father, must serve him in a way proper to the capacity he has given them: and we may just as well pray to him in an unknown tongue, as sing his praise in words or phrases which we do not understand. A piece of sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal is not more worthless, in the Divine estimation, than we shall be, if we offer him a blind, unmeaning service, which, from the nature of things, must also be unprofitable to ourselves. And therefore the Apostle declares, that although he would sing with the spirit, yet it should be with the understanding also(d).

ONCE more, our praises as well as prayers, should be offered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our  
souls

(a) *Psalms* 47, 6, 66, 1, 2, 81, 1—(b) *Matthew* 26, 30—(c) *Luke* 19, 37—(d) *1 Cor.* 14, 15.

souls should directly rely upon, and have express reference to him, as the only way for perishing sinners to approach to God, and as the only meritorious cause of our acceptance with him. We should be exercised toward him according to the discoveries which we have respecting *his person—his character—his offices*; and particularly, make use of his NAME as our great plea with God. This is that *new manner* of approaching the Most High, by that new and living way which Christ hath consecrated through the vail of his flesh, which is peculiar to the christian Dispensation—which saints under the Law were not instructed in—and which is not to be found in their prayers, or praises. All this is evident from the following scriptures—“ And whatsoever ye shall ask in *my name*,” saith the Saviour, “ that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in *my name*, I will do it.”(a) Again he saith, “ Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father, in *my name*, he may give it you.”(b) And again, “ Verily verily I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in *my name*, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in *my name*: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in parables: the time cometh when I shall no more speak unto you in parables, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in *my name*.”(c)

THESE are remarkable passages, declaring the duty, and the privilege of christians, beyond what was discovered to the Jews, or even to Christs own disciples before

a) John 14. 13, 14.—(b) 15, 16.—(c) 16, 23, 24, 25 26.

before that time. Hitherto, says he, ye have asked nothing in *my name*." This was the case in the Jewish worship, and is so still with them. " But the time cometh when I shall shew you plainly of the Father." The time referred to here, was very probably the day of Pentecost. " At that day," adds he, " ye shall ask in *my name*." And it is very remarkable that the Apostle in the verse following my text, expressly applies this command to singing the praise of God, as well as to other religious exercises; for having enjoined this duty, he immediately adds, " And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, do all in *the name* of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him."

SECOND. We are to enquire into the *subject matter* of the praise we offer to God. This, indeed, is so various and manifold, that a particular detail of it, is not to be expected. In the general, we may observe, that as God alone is the *object* of all religious adoration and praise, the *matter* thereof should consist of those things which have respect to HIM, either considered in himself, or in his dispensations to ourselves or to others. But as God hath made various discoveries of himself to fallen man, with gradually encreasing light and fullness, *the matter* of our praise should be conformable to the clearness and fullness of the Revelation which we enjoy—This, indeed, I take to be self-evident—Hence many things become the *matter* of the christians praise, which were not, and, indeed, could not be a subject to the saints under former dispensations, because they were not revealed. As an example of this, take the hymn which the Apostle John addressed to the Saviour, " Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, unto him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen."(a)

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Where do you find such a subject of praise before the Gospel Dispensation?—The truth is, little of the real and spiritual glory of God—the doctrine of the Trinity—the eternal device of mans salvation—the manner of accomplishing it in the incarnation, life, actions, doctrines, sufferings and death, resurrection, ascension, intercession and mediatorial Kingdom of the Saviour—his final coming to judge the world—the form of process in that awful scene—the future state of the righteous and the wicked—the dispensation of the Holy Spirit—his perfection, grace, and saving influence.—I say, little of these things, and of many more that might be mentioned, was discovered to mankind before the birth of Christ, *in comparison of what was afterwards revealed.\** And all these are proper matter for christian praise according to the state of the church—of families—and of individual persons from time to time.

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Thirdly

\* If any one has read the scripture so inattentively, as to need a particular proof of this; let him consider the following passages, 1 Cor. 2 chap. from the 7th to the 13th verse. Here the Apostle calls the Gospel, in general, a mystery, hidden till that time; and that those things which eye had not seen, ear heard, and of which it had not so much as entered the heart of man to conceive, before that time, were then revealed to the Apostles by the Spirit, and by them declared plainly to men, that they might know the things which were freely given them of God. In like manner he declares (2 Tim. 1, 10.) that it is by the Gospel Life and Immortality are brought to light. And to mention no more, Christ, after having promised to send the Comforter, tells his Disciples, (John 16, 12, 13, 14,) that when he should come, he would lead them into all truth—and shew them the things of Christ. But if all necessary truth, and the things of Christ had been revealed before, this extraordinary Dispensation of the Spirit to the Apostles would have been a very useless thing.

THIRDLY. The *end* we should have in view, in singing the praises of God, is two-fold, viz. respecting God, and respecting ourselves—As it respects God, (which is the primary end) we should have in view to extol and honour him—to shew forth his glory in the most exalted strains—to magnify his great name, which deserves to be exalted above heaven and earth—to acknowledge and declare his supreme perfection, his absolute dominion, his universal agency; and particularly, to celebrate his matchless wisdom, love and grace in the decree of man's salvation.

As it respects ourselves, the design is, to elevate our affections—enliven our graces—express and promote our spiritual joy—and to compose the distractions of a troubled spirit. To this, the exercise has a native tendency; especially when in concert, we have the pleasure of *harmony*, and the enlivening sound of many voices united. It is natural, too, when the heart is full of joy, to give it vent this way, and accordingly the Apostle exhorts, “Is any merry let him sing psalms(a). Moreover, the Apostle, in my text, mentions another end with regard to ourselves and others, viz. *instruction*, “teaching and admonishing one another, says he, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs.” To this purpose also, the ordinance is naturally suited. Moral and religious truths, and indeed, any matter whatever, thrown into plain and agreeable verse, generally makes a more lasting impression on the memory, than prose compositions; and when they are frequently repeated, or sung, the effect will be proportionally more lasting and strong.

FOURTHLY. I shall now proceed to lay down some principles for the regulation of our conduct in this important part of worship. And

FIRST. All christians should endeavour to attain

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as much skill in church music, as their capacity, their opportunities, and other duties will admit. It would surely be monstrous confusion, if every one, in a worshipping assembly, were to sing an air different from all the rest; and as mankind are not taught by nature to sing, all, any one air, it is therefore necessary, that they who sing together, should previously qualify themselves for it by learning. It is also as evident, that if we are to sing at all, the more we are skilled in the art, the better, shall we be qualified, other things being equal, to perform the duty. Inattention to this principle, has almost ruined our psalmody; it has rendered that part of divine worship, which, in its own nature, is the most exalted and pleasurable, in fact, the most dull and unedifying. Many persons, and some of them, perhaps, truly religious, either through mistake and prejudice, or laziness and indolence, persuade themselves, that if the heart be devout, it is no matter what the sound of the voice is. But surely David was of a very different opinion when he exhorted thus, “sing unto him a new song, play skilfully with a loud noise”(a).—There is certainly as much propriety in making any sort of sounds with an instrument, when that is used in divine worship, as in making any sort of sounds with the voice, when we sing his praise: and the same reasons which plead for skilfulness in the one case, will also plead for it in the other. We have observed, that singing was designed to aid and promote, as well as to express the feelings of the heart: consequently, the more exquisite the music is, the more powerful, to this purpose, will its influence be. To be convinced of this, you need only consult your own frame, as it is the workmanship of God. The author of our being has constituted us so, that we naturally and indeed, necessarily perceive and relish harmony in sounds, and  
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(a) *Psalm* 33, 3.

are offended with discords, just as we taste sweetness in honey, bitterness in gall—smell an agreeable odour from the rose; an offensive one, from a putrid carcase. If you give this consideration its proper weight, I presume, it will persuade you, that we should cultivate church music to such a degree, as to carry it on in *concert*, that is to say, in different parts and various sounds so set together as to produce *harmony*. This is the perfection of music—and the capacity to perform it, and the taste to relish it when performed, is peculiar to man. The Creator hath given to some other animals a power to sing; but none of them discover any capacity for *harmony*: never has any choir of them been heard to perform any thing like it. In this, man stands as *really* distinguished from the lower creation, as in the power of speech, or any other faculty.—I ask now, shall this pleasing, this distinguishing capacity never be called forth to exercise? Is this part of the divine workmanship useless and vain? If not, where and when shall it be employed? Shall it be only in folly and vanity, or mere amusement? Or rather, should it not be consecrated to the service of that Being whose workmanship it is? I will venture to leave it with every one candidly to decide.

LET us, therefore, cultivate church music ourselves, and promote the cultivation of it in our children. The earlier in life any one begins, the greater progress he will make; and hence, those societies are certainly to be commended, who make it a part of school education, and have their children trained to sing, at the same time they are taught to read: nor do I expect to see this art flourish as it ought, until this practice becomes general. In the mean time, the usual mode, of schools for grown persons, should be kept up, under proper regulations, and capable teachers.

SECONDLY. It is the duty of *all* to sing the praises

praises of God, This is evident both from reason and scripture. The supreme Majesty of Heaven and Earth is infinitely worthy to be praised by every rational creature; and no person on earth can be in such a situation, or stand in such a relation to his Maker, as not to be under obligations to praise him. Even under the Jewish dispensation, although particular choirs of singing men and singing women were appointed, yet David himself calls upon *all*, without exception, to praise, "Let the people praise thee O God, let *all* the people praise thee"(a). Under the gospel dispensation, the duty is still farther inculcated, in terms which equally apply to *all*, as in my text, and in the epistle to the Ephesians already quoted. It is therefore, wickedness to neglect a duty so exalted, so pleasing, and to which we are under so many endearing obligations.— And it is certainly shameful, for a professor of Christianity to be silent, when others are singing the praises of God around him; as if he had no more concern in this sublime act of worship, than to amuse himself. = Such conduct betrays a heart very insensible of the Divine goodness, if not totally destitute of real piety.— The spirit of true religion breaths thus, "It is good to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High"(b). If we have tasted that the Lord is gracious, we will delight to sing his praise, and think that we have sustained a loss, both as to profit and pleasure, if at any time we have been absent, when this part of Divine worship has been performed, whether in the family or church.

THIRDLY. We ought to sing in a *continued air*; and not interrupt the music by parcelling out the psalm, or hymn, or spiritual song, line by line. This is really so unnatural a mode, that I am persuaded nothing but dire necessity could have suggested, or introduced it

(a) Psalm 67, 3. (b) Psalm 92, 1.

it into the church. In the middle centuries of the Christian æra, learning was almost entirely banished from Europe : scarcely a trace of it was to be found but in the monasteries, and among the clergy. When after this, learning began to revive, so rare a thing was it to find, *among the common ranks of men*, a person who could read, and so highly was it esteemed, that, although one had been convicted of a capital crime, yet if he could read, he was acquitted:—his counsel urged, in his behalf, this plea, "*legit ut clericus*," *he reads as a Clergyman*, and if, upon trial, it was found true, the court absolved him from punishment. In this situation matters were when the reformation took place, and for a considerable time after; so that the Officers of the Church were obliged to have recourse to this expedient, viz. to appoint a clerk, who could read, to parcel out the psalm, line by line, to the illiterate congregation, in order that all might join in this important part of Divine worship. But behold the force of custom, and its prevalence even over reason and common sense! We adhere to this mode still, although the necessity which introduced it, and which alone could justify it, is long since ceased.

MANY evils attend this mode of singing—It consumes time unnecessarily—prevents the pleasure and advantage of singing a larger portion of a psalm than that, to which, in this way, we are obliged to confine ourselves—it in a great measure, destroys the music, and consequently, marring the effect it is designed to have on the heart—and unless we have the composition by memory, it leaves us often to sing without knowing what, until the next line comes out to give us the sense.—It is surely high time for us to lay aside this childish mode of praising God—Let each one, or at most every two or three, bring a psalm book to the worship of God, that so, having the subject before  
our

our eyes, we may sing without interruption, and drop that unnatural mixture of reading and singing which now marrs and disgraces our psalmody.

FOURTHLY. We, whose great advantage it is to live under the Gospel Dispensation, ought not to *confine* ourselves to that system of psalmody which was framed for, and exactly suited to that Dispensation of Divine grace under which the Jews were placed, and which was, *comparatively*, obscure and imperfect.

THIS principle I shall establish by the text itself—by necessary consequence from other parts of scripture—and by the difference of the two Dispensations from each other.

THE language of my text is very strong to this purpose. The Apostle enjoins it upon christians, that they be richly furnished, or extensively acquainted with the *word of Christ*—those important discoveries which the Gospel makes; and that this rich furniture of Gospel knowledge, should not be, in them, a useless treasure, as a spring shut up or fountain sealed, but that it should be communicated, and flow out for the instruction and edification of one another; and particularly, that it should be thus employed in their songs of praise and other poetical compositions. Now, my brethren I wish you to consider, how it is possible to practise this injunction, while we *confine* ourselves to the Jewish psalmody. Were you to undertake to instruct any person in the way of salvation for perishing sinners, which God hath appointed; and would lead him to a just acquaintance with those things which pertain to life and godliness—to the faith and practice of a christian; would you take *this* system of psalmody for your rule; or would you use the New Testament for that purpose; and that whether the instruction was to be delivered in poetical, or prose composition? Indeed, we not only grant, we maintain in the feeblest manner,  
that

that there are many prophecies of, and references to the Saviour, in the book of psalms; but at the same time, we must also maintain, that, instead of learning the Gospel by these, it is by the light of the Gospel we understand them, and learn how to apply them. Let us suppose a person, who knew not what religion we professed, were to come into our worshipping assemblies, week after week, yea, year after year, and hear our songs of praise:—would he, by them, learn the word of Christ? Would he, at least, conclude, that that *word* dwelt in us richly? Or rather, would he not, from this part of our religious service, form the same opinion of us, that he would of an assembly of worshipping Jews? From our sermons and our prayers, indeed, he might learn our profession, and the *word of Christ*; but the Apostle enjoins, that we should teach this particularly in our praises. I therefore ask again, how can we teach one another the glorious discoveries of the Gospel, or evidence that it dwell in us richly, by our songs and praise, when yet these songs contain not these discoveries, but must, themselves, be understood by a previous knowledge of the word of Christ: and when yet the subject matter of our psalms, and our mode of expressing it, is precisely the same as theirs, who reject the Gospel altogether? The principle may also be supported by *necessary consequence* from other parts of scripture. To this purpose, let me lead your attention, particularly, to the fourteenth chapter of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians. The professed design of the Apostle, in this chapter, is to regulate the Corinthian church in the exercise of their *spiritual gifts*. Among these he mentions the gift of *dictating a psalm* to be sung in public worship, (compare verses 15, and 26). Now, if christians should sing no compositions in the worship of God, but those contained in the Book of psalm

psalms used by the Jews, there could be no need, nay, there could be no room for a spiritual gift, *i. e.* extraordinary inspiration, to enable them to propose a psalm to be sung in Divine worship; for upon this supposition, every composition they should use, was written for them long before. But it is as evident as words can well declare, that there was, in the first age of Christianity, such a *gift*, and various christians were divinely inspired to utter a psalm in the public assembly; from which it necessarily follows, that the christian church was not *confined* to the Jewish system of psalmody, in the Apostles days; and if it was not *then*, I would wish to know by what authority it is confined to that system *now*.\* Moreover, the principle may be

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inferred

\* I have scarcely ever met with a more gross and palpable perversion of scripture, than that which represents the Apostle, in the above cited chapter, as condemning and correcting the Corinthians for introducing new psalms at all into divine worship. The passage particularly chosen to support this miserable interpretation, is the 26th verse, where the Apostle says, "How is it, brethren?--When ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation." The judicious reader will immediately see, that if the Apostle meant to reprove the Corinthians for practising any one of these things, he re-proves them for the whole; for they are all mentioned together in the same point of view: and where, then, will the censure ultimately fall? It will (I shudder to write it) fall upon the Holy Spirit, by whose extraordinary influence they were, and by which alone, indeed, they could be enabled to speak with tongues they had never learned, and to utter revelations. This single consideration is sufficient to prove that the Apostle is not censuring the use of these extraordinary gifts. The preceding and subsequent parts of the chapter shew, that it

inferred from the practice of the inspired Apostle John, "Unto him who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; unto him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen." (a) This hymn of praise, which he addressed to the Redeemer,

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(a) *Rev.* 1, 5, 6.

was the abuse of them---the disorderly mode of exercising them, which prevailed in the Corinthian church, that he here sets himself to correct-----and the disorder was plainly this---Whilst one was delivering a psalm to be sung in the public assembly, with which he had been inspired, another rose up and delivered a doctrine which had, in the same manner, been dictated to him,---a third, perhaps, would speak in an unknown tongue,---a fourth, relate a revelation with which he had been favoured, and so on. Hence, two or three, perhaps four or five persons would be speaking at the same instant of time, which not only produced confusion, but prevented all edification. Therefore the Apostle directs, that they should exercise these gifts, and deliver the things with which they were respectively charged, whether psalm, doctrine, tongue, revelation, &c. in turn, or, as he expresses it, by course (compare verses 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33):---observing, that they might all have an opportunity, in this orderly manner, one after another, of delivering whatever they were favoured with; and that they were not under any necessity of breaking through the rules of the strictest regularity, for, says he "The spirits of the prophets, are subject to the prophets," that is to say, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is not a blind and wild impulse, which forces a person to utter whatever is communicated to him, at the moment he receives it; on the contrary, it leaves him master of himself, so as that he can wait the proper time of discovering it. Upon the whole, this passage of sacred writ establishes, beyond all contradiction, that, under the administration of the

Apostles

is certainly new, i. e. it is not to be found in the Book of psalms. And to mention no more, those scriptures which teach us to pray and praise, and, indeed, to do all our acts of religious worship in the *name* of Christ, in such a manner as our Lord himself expressly tells his disciples they had never done before, most evidently shew that christians should not *confine* themselves to the *forms* of worship used under the former dispensation; but that, in prayer, praise, &c. they should have, according to the light and fulness of the Gospel, a more express reference to the Name, the person, and offices of the Lord Jesus Christ, than is to be found in any discoveries, or compositions under the Law(b).

ONCE

Apostles, and by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Church of Christ was directed to use other psalms than those of David, in Divine worship. And it is more than probable that christians continued in this practice for, at least, three hundred years after the first plantation of Christianity. Doctor Mosheim, one of the most accurate and credible ecclesiastical historians, asserts that it was not till in the fourth century, that the psalms of David were introduced into christian worship; and that even then they were only used among other hymns that had been in practice(a). And I am the more inclined to believe this, because I find, that the most zealous advocates for using the psalms of David alone in christian worship, are not able to produce one testimony to their purpose, earlier than the fourth century.

(a) Mosh. Eccles. Hist. on the fourth Century.

(b) John 14. 13, 14---15, 16---16, 23, 24, 25, 26. Col. 3. 17. As a corroborating circumstance here, I shall mention a passage in one of the epistles of Pliny the younger (lib. x. Ep. 97.) to the emperor Trajan, in which he informs that prince, " that the christians sung a hymn

ONCE more, this principle may be established by the consideration of the *difference* of the two dispensations (the Jewish and the Christian) from each other. This is a topic on which the Apostle Paul, especially, dwells much. He expressly terms the Jewish dispensation, the ministration of death, and, of condemnation(a)—a state of bondage, and, servitude(b)—says that it contained only the shadow of good things to come(c)—and that the ritual of religious worship instituted under it, was *weak and poor elements, a worldly sanctuary, and carnal ordinances*(d). But in the passages just now referred to, he terms the Gospel Dispensation, the ministration of the spirit—the ministration of life, and, of righteousness—a state of freedom and sonship. Our Lord and Saviour himself represents the Gospel Dispensation

(a) 2 Cor. 3, 7, 9.—(b) Gal. 4, 3, 7, 9.—(c) Heb. 10, 1.—(d) Heb. 9, 1, 10.—Gal. 4, 9.

to Christ as to a God.” Upon this passage I would remark, that if the christians in this first age of the Church, had sung nothing but the psalms of David, neither Pliny himself, nor any spies, which might creep into christian assemblies, could have known that their hymns were addressed to Christ as to a God, because there is not, in these psalms, any such express mention made of his Name or of those distinguishing characteristics by which Jesus of Nazareth could be generally known, as to make heathens think, that those who sung them were thereby celebrating the Divine glories of that crucified One. I therefore conclude, that in the psalms, or hymns used by the first christians, there was such a plain, express and literal mention made of the Name, and other distinguishing characters of Jesus Christ, as that every one who heard, and understood the language, must immediately perceive that HE was the object of their praise and adoration. And such, I contend, should the general strain of christian hymns still be.

penfation and the worship which fhould be performed under it, *ſpirit and truth*, in contradiftinction to the Jewiſh œconomy and its worship, which conſiſted ſo much in types and ſhadows, but had not the very image or *reality* itſelf(a).

Now, it muſt be particularly obſerved that the Jewiſh ſyſtem of pfalmody, was exactly ſuited to the diſpenſation under which that people were placed; and that *many* of them have ſuch expreſs reference to the peculiarities of the Jewiſh worship—have thoſe *ordinances* of it which the Apoſtle calls *worldly, weak, poor, &c.* ſo interwoven with their very ſubject matter, that they cannot, univerſally, ſuit the Goſpel Diſpenſation which is ſo widely different from the Jewiſh, as we have heard; and under which theſe ordinances are entirely aboliſhed\*. I beſeech chriſtians ſeriouſly to con-

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(a) *John* 4, 23.

\* It is a ſtriking mark of unerring wiſdom which appears in all the works and ways of God, both in the natural and moral world, that he adjusts one thing exactly to another, according to the time, place, relation, connection, and other circumſtances of men and things, and the end he deſigns to accompliſh. This is evident in the pſalms of David when viewed as a ſyſtem for the Jewiſh Diſpenſation:---for that, they were perfect and compleat; but, on this very account, they are not ſuitable, as a ſyſtem or liturgy, for New Teſtament worship.

Some have been cenſured, as having uſed contemptuous and diminutive epithets when ſpeaking of the pſalms of David. If any have really done ſo, i. e. if they have uſed other phraſes than they are warranted in by the ſacred ſcriptures, or with a view to pour contempt upon any part of the oracles of God, let them receive all that cenſure and reproach that can be heaped upon them. All ſuch cenſures, I hope, I ſhall eſcape, as, in repreſenting the difference between the two diſpenſations, I have exactly uſed the language of the Holy Spirit in the ſcripture.

sider with what propriety they can *now* call upon one another to praise God with the harp, the psaltery, the timbrel and dance, with stringed instruments, organs, and loud sounding cymbals—and to blow up the trumpet in the new moon; when at the same time, they mean not at all to do any such thing?—Upon what principles can we *now* intreat God to do good to Zion with this declaration in our mouths, that then he should be pleased with whole burnt offerings and bullocks which the church would offer upon his altar?—Under the Jewish Dispensation, such offerings were proper—they were Divine Ordinances—and the pious worshippers not only expressed them in words, but intended, and actually performed them: but no christian believes he should present such offerings, or, if he did, that they would be pleasing to God. Can we, consistently with truth, say, in our songs of praise, that sparrows and swallows build by the altar of God—and that they are blessed who travel through the dry valley of Baca, dig wells in it, and collect the rain in pools to supply themselves with drink, whilst they are coming from a distant part of Judea, to celebrate the annual festivals at Jerusalem? Whilst the Jewish œconomy lasted, this could be sung with truth; but now it cannot—these things exist no more[a]. Many similar instances might be produced; but these are sufficient to illustrate the truth I am establishing. If it should be said, that we ought not *now* to sing these, and such like psalms in their literal meaning, but should gospelize them; and that many do actually thus paraphrase and expound before they sing them:—then I reply, that this, in reality, gives up the point, and establishes the very *principle* I am pleading for. It is a tacit acknowledgment that

[a] *Psalms* 81. 2, 3.—93. 5 6.—150. 3, 4, 5.—51. 18, 19.—66. 13, 14, 15,—84. 3, 4, 5.

that some of the psalms at least, in their plain and literal sense—the sense in which, it is certain, they were used under the former dispensation, are not suited to Gospel times. And, methinks, the most zealous contenders for the propriety of singing these psalms without exception, should consider a moment, whether they themselves sing them in reality, when they drop any part of their original meaning, and substitute their own notions in its room. Certainly, *mere words* neither constitute prayer nor praise—They both mainly consist in the ideas of the mind and sentiments of the heart: and if these be different from the original meaning of the composition we use, it is not that composition, but something else which, in truth, we offer to God. But notwithstanding that praise does not consist in *mere words*, yet when we have words enough to express our meaning plainly and pertinently, it must be very absurd, if not a kind of mockery, to approach the Most High with expressions in our mouths to which we have either no meaning at all, or one very different from their obvious sense, and that which they were originally intended to convey.

BUT beside all this, and supposing there was not a single reference to the ceremonies of the Law, in the psalms of David, yet I presume every one must grant they are far short of the fulness and clearness of the Gospel: and from this consideration I plead, that christians should not *confine* themselves to them. The difference between the discoveries made under the Jewish, & under the Christian Dispensation, may be fitly illustrated by the imperfect knowledge we have of a person, who has always appeared *veiled* to us, in comparison of that which we have when all the features and lineaments of his face are clearly reflected to our eye from the brightest mirror. This illustration, the Apostle himself uses.

It is *necessary* that prophecy should be obscure—if it were not, the moral agency of man must be destroyed, in order to the accomplishment of the predicted events. And it is the nature of an introductory dispensation to be, *comparatively*, imperfect. This, in truth, is the fact, in the case before us; for, as I have already proved, there are many objects of knowledge, and subjects for praise discovered in the Gospel, which are not to be found in any part of the Old Testament. So that, if we *confine* ourselves to the psalms of David, we shall exclude from our songs of praise, the distinguishing glories of the Gospel, and still hold the *vail* upon the lovely face of the Redeemer—we shall ungratefully reject the Light, and resolutely continue in the obscurity of the former Dispensation.

AND now, probably, you will be ready to enquire, What shall christians sing; and what shall be the rule of their direction in this important part of religious worship? To this I answer, just as your shorter catechism answers the question, *What rule hath God given for our direction in prayer?* In like manner, the whole word of God is of use to direct us in praise; but the special rule of direction is the Gospel—the New Testament. Or, more particularly, thus, Although we ought not to *confine* ourselves to the psalms of David, as I hope I have proved to your satisfaction, yet there are *many of them*, and other parts also of the Old Testament, which so excellently express the exercises of a pious and devout heart, and so sublimely extol the Most High, without any reference to the peculiarities of that Dispensation which is now abolished, that they contain *matter* proper to be sung to the end of the world. To these should be added those glorious subjects of praise which the *Gospel alone* reveals. And there are christians qualified to form all these into plain and agreeable verse. It is then the business of the Church,

Church, that is to say, the supreme judicatory thereof, to examine and judge of these compositions; and, having selected such of them as they shall deem proper and sufficient, *appoint* them to be used in public worship. This same collection may also serve, generally, for family, and even the most secret praise. I say, *generally*; for I openly declare, that in private, a christian is not bound to *confine* himself to any collection of such compositions; but that, if he has a capacity to compose a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song, he has a right so to do, and to sing it in praise, just as he has a right to use his own words in prayer. And when any person shall disprove the one, I will also, from the same principles, disprove the other. I proceed,

FIFTH. To remove any difficulties or objections which may seem to lie against the preceding view of the subject. To some, this branch of the subject may, very possibly, seem quite unnecessary: and, indeed, from the manner in which I have treated it, I presume, an answer may be found, either directly, or by easy consequence, to any objection that can be raised against it. Nevertheless, least any one should be perplexed with difficulties speciously proposed, I shall state those which I have not so directly obviated.

FIRST. It is said, that if we do not sing all the psalms of David, or introduce any others into the worship of God, we will weaken the authority of that sacred book, and aid the cause of Deism.

Is it so then, my brethren, that we weaken the authority of all that scripture which we do not practice as it was once done? Then, indeed, we must observe all the laws and ordinances respecting the distinction between clean and unclean beasts—washings—sacrifices—circumcision—the passover—and in one word, *all the ceremonial and judicial law of the Jews*, which constitutes

constitutes a considerable part of sacred scripture.—  
 These were all Divine Institutions—binding upon, and  
 actually practised by the Church of old. And yet,  
 after all, I presume, the objectors themselves would  
 deem it an abomination to practise some, at least, of  
 these things now. With what face then can it be said,  
 that we weaken the authority of the psalms of David,  
*merely* because we do not use them as a system of  
 psalmody in Gospel times, as they were appointed to  
 the Jews? Let it be observed also, that there are  
 many songs recorded in the Old Testament, and sung  
 by the Church then, which are not to be found in the  
 Book of psalms; such as the song of Moses on pas-  
 sing the red sea(a)—the song of Hezekiah(b)—of Ha-  
 bakkuk, which he particularly directs to the chief  
 Musician(c)—the song which Jeremiah composed on  
 the death of Josiah, the singing of which, he made a  
*statute* in Israel(d), and more that might be mentioned.  
 Is the authority of these weakened because neither  
 Jews nor Christians sing them now? I presume, not.  
 This is the very objection, in effect, which was bro't  
 by the Jews and judaizing teachers against the Apo-  
 stles of Christ, when they taught that the Jewish ritual  
 of worship and all their ceremonial ordinances were  
 abolished. But, I think, there is no christian now,  
 who believes they were guilty of the charge. And if  
 they were not, I beseech you to consider seriously,  
 how it can lie against any, *merely* for not singing those  
 psalms which have so direct and immediate a reference  
 to those Ordinances—have so much of that abolished  
 ritual interwoven with the very subject matter of them,  
 that if the one ceases to exist, the other necessarily  
 ceases with it, i. e. as to its fitness and obligation to be  
 practised

(a) *Exod.* 15—(b) *Isai.* 38, 10, 20—(c) *Hab.* 3.  
 —(d) *2 Chron.* 35, 25.

practised in Gospel times. Nay, my brethren, we revere the sacred scripture in all its parts—the Old, as well as the New Testament; and regard it as the Oracles of the only living and true God. But we desire to regard and use it according to its true end and design; not confounding and mixing together those things which God has separated—not blending Judaism with Christianity; but by giving every thing its proper place, both as to faith and practice, according as it respects the dispensations that have ceased, or as it regards that *last and best*, under which we live, and which alone declares the worship and ordinances which the King and Head of the Church hath appointed for his followers now.\*

## SECOND.

\* The above objection, in substance, has been advanced in another form, thus, “Whatever is fit to be read, is fit to be sung; if therefore we may not sing all the psalms of David, neither must we read them, and thus, we shall reject them entirely.” Nothing can be more weak and absurd than this cavil. Reading and singing are quite distinct ordinances in their nature, and often in their object and end. Singing in praise of God, is, in its nature a direct and immediate act of religious worship and adoration; reading is not so.—In singing praises, God is the immediate object, and the primary end, is to celebrate his supreme glory and perfection, in himself, and in his works and ways; in reading, the primary end is instruction and edification. Singing is a natural, and an appointed mean of expressing our spiritual joy; reading is not so; and hence, when one is in this frame, the Apostle does not enjoin it upon him to read, but to sing psalms (Jam. 5. 13.) From this, it is easy to see, that many things may be fit matter for reading, which would be very improper to be sung in praise to God. I shall illustrate this by an example—It is undoubtedly proper to read every part of scripture; but suppose a person were

SECOND. It is objected, that the plan I have pled for, is substituting human compositions in the room of Divine inspiration, and will be attended with many dangerous consequences.

THIS objection arises from an entire mistake of the point. There is an essential difference between the *matter* and the *form* of every subject. Hence, the subject matter of a psalm may be Divine, e. i. by divine inspiration; and the form of it, merely human:—and this is actually the case in that system and version of psalms, which the objectors themselves contend for. By the *form* of a psalm, I mean, the phrases chosen to express the sense—the manner and order of arranging the words and sentences—and the measure of the verse. Now, supposing that God had dictated to David, Asaph, and others, *all this*, as well as the ideas, or subject matter of the psalms, yet this would only be the case in the original language in which the revelation

to take the first chapter of the first Book of Chronicles, for instance, and sing, as an act of religious worship and praise to God, the genealogical line of descent from Adam to Noah, from thence to Abraham,—then trace the line through Ishmael a little,---then turn to Esau, trace the line through him a while, and conclude with a list of the Kings and Dukes of Edom. Or, suppose he were to take the second chapter of the Book of Ezra, and sing in like manner, the numbers of these who returned with Zerubbabel from the Babylonish captivity---together with the names of the towns and districts to which they respectively belonged, and the number of the horses, camels, asses, and knives<sup>(a)</sup> which they brought with them to Jerusalem ——— What would you think of the exercise? Or, what opinion would you conceive of the performer? You would surely conclude, that he was divested of reason, or that he intended to turn the Duty of singing the praises of God, into ridicule.

(a) This particular is in chapter 1, 9.

lation was made: so soon as ever they were translated, the *form* was changed, and became human. This is still further evident in the poetical version which we have hitherto used; many of the words and phrases are even different from those used in the prose translation, and the form is merely human; unless we suppose Rouse was divinely inspired when he versified the psalms, and that the Holy Spirit dictated to him the very phrases and measure of his verse; which, I am sure, no man of sober sense ever believed. It is evident, therefore, to a demonstration, that the form of David's psalms, as they stand in our version, is human, although the subject matter of them is divine. Now, this is precisely the case in the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs formed from suitable parts of scripture in general, and particularly from the New Testament, as I have mentioned before: the form—the composition, will be human; but the subject matter, divine. For surely every christian believes, that the Gospel is from Heaven—that it is given by Divine inspiration, in as high a sense as the Book of psalms, or any other part of scripture. And it is certain, that the subject matter of it is much more clearly and fully discovered, than the matter of David's psalms; for many of them were prophetic, which is always obscure; and many of them typical, which it is often difficult to unfold.

As for dangerous consequences, there are none attending this mode, more than any other, in which imperfect creatures are concerned. Certainly, the sense, the mind of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament, can be as faithfully preserved and expressed in a poetical, as in a prose translation or discourse. And I leave it with every one candidly to judge, whether there is not much more danger of mingling our own fancies, and mistaken notions with the matter of our praise, when we expound the psalms of David for ourselves,

or depend upon the exposition of every preacher;—than when we have the subject in so plain a dress as not to need an exposition—when we have it constantly in possession, so that we can leisurely compare it with the unerring standard—and when too, it has received the approbation of the supreme judicatory of the Church.

THIRD. It is said, that Christ and his Disciples used the psalmody of the Jewish Church—And that if he had deemed it unfit for the Gospel Dispensation, he would have given his Church a new system.

THE first part of this objection has no force, because Christ and his Disciples during his abode on earth, were under the Jewish Dispensation, to which that psalmody was suited. Hence, they observed the ceremonial law, but this does not oblige us to observe it. The point here is not, what was proper under the law, but what is so under the Gospel. Beside, it can never be proved that the Saviour *confined* himself to that system; and, as I have already observed, it is more than probable he composed an hymn at the celebration of his own supper.

THE other part of the objection, viz. that if he had deemed the Jewish psalmody unfit for the Christian Dispensation, he would have given his church a new system, I totally deny; and for this plain reason, because it was not *necessary*. And that it was not necessary, I hope the following considerations will satisfy you.

THE gracious Saviour has provided and left in his word, and by the *ordinary influences* of his Holy Spirit, sufficient furniture of light, gifts, and graces, for all the parts of religious worship, without leaving a system or liturgy, in the precise words of which, we should either pray, or praise, or preach. Indeed, in the first age of the christian church, when as yet the full revelation of all things which pertain to life and  
godliness

godliness was not made, nor the Canon of New Testament scripture collected together; extraordinary aid was necessary, and was accordingly afforded in every part of divine worship, whether praying, praising, or preaching. This is evident from many parts of the New Testament, particularly from the 12th and 14th chapters of Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, already referred to. But when the Canon of scripture was compleated, with a fulness and clearness so great, that he who runs may read and understand, this extraordinary aid ceased; and even those inspired prayers, hymns, and sermons, are not recorded. And can we need a more satisfactory proof, that liturgies composed for these purposes, are not necessary *now*? Let not christians depreciate their privileges, nor think meanly of their advantages; if you do, you will neither improve them wisely, nor feel that gratitude to your God and Saviour for them, to which you are under so many endearing obligations. I repeat it, therefore, the church now, and individuals, have furniture provided for them, *in the ordinary way*, for all the worship they are called respectively to perform—a furniture rich, abundant, and overflowing. The Gospel reveals the subject matter in the fullest and clearest manner—the Holy Spirit, as a spirit of light, of sanctification, and of comfort, is more abundantly communicated, than under former Dispensations—insomuch, that the weakest *true* christian now, has a more compleat knowledge of Gods merciful purpose and device for the salvation of fallen man—the method of accomplishing it—and the acceptable way of a sinners approach to the Most High, than the greatest Old Testament prophet. Probably, by some, this will be thought *bold language*: yet it is not bolder than I am warranted to use, both by the Old and New Testament. To prove this, observe the strong language of the prophet

phet Isaiah, " Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound."(a) Nothing can be more evident, from the whole preceding context, than that this refers to Gospel times, and is a prophetic description of the happy circumstances of the Jews when they should embrace the Gospel; and as *light*, when the term is used figuratively, almost universally means *knowledge* and understanding, the obvious sense of the passage is, that when they should be converted to christianity, their knowledge would as far exceed what they, under the law, possessed, as the light of the sun exceeds the light of the moon, or as the light of seven days or seven suns collected, exceeds the light of a single one.\* Still more strong is the language

(a) *Isai.* 30, 26.

\* This passage has been interpreted as if by the moon, was meant the type, and by the sun, the anti-type—that both are to be kept in immediate view under the Gospel—and that both will thus be better understood.--For, say these expositors, on this plan we shall have the type and the anti-type mutually shining upon and illustrating each other, like the sun and the moon. And all this is said to prove, that we should use the typical language and ceremonial references of the Book of psalms, in christian worship. This is, truly, as strange an interpretation as one could well imagine. Sure I am, the Holy Spirit never used such an unnatural figure, as upon the above hypothesis, this would be. For, let me ask, did any person ever see it, or is it a truth, that the moon shines upon the sun, and adds to his light and splendor?--No surely. On the contrary, her faint rays are all borrowed from him--when he appears in our horizon, she is immediately eclipsed, disappears in the blaze of his resplendent

language of Zechariah, " In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and he that is feeble among them at that day, shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the Angel of the Lord before them."(a) It will not be disputed, I presume, that this refers to spiritual and religious advantages under the Gospel; advantages so far superior to what were enjoyed under the law, that the feeble, the weakest christian among the Jews when converted to the Faith, will be as David, in point of religious attainments—and the house of David, the more advanced christians among them, as the Angel of God in comparison of David. The language of the New Testament is still more express to this purpose. Our Lord spoke to his disciples thus, " For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.(b) If this was the case with regard to his disciples, long before the full display of gospel light, and when, as yet, they were but babes in christian knowledge; how much more must it be so with those who enjoy the noon-day light of the Gospel. In another place our Lord thus declares, " For I say unto you, among those that are born of woman there is not a

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greater

(a) *Zech.* 12. 8.—(b) *Luke* 10, 24.

fulgent orb, and becomes useless to us in point of communicating light---It is only in his absence that she is, or can be beneficial in this respect. It is just so in the other case. When the glorious SUN of righteousness hath arisen, and is shining upon us with meridian brightness, types and shadows should flee away---they may injure, but profit us they cannot---and like the moon, which, by being enterposed, hides something of the sun's light, even so these, so far as they are made the immediate objects of our contemplation, will obscure our views of the Redeemer.

greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."(a)——The kingdom of God, or, the kingdom of heaven, as Matthew, in a parallel passage, records it,(b) is but another expression for the Gospel Dispensation, which is evident, both because our Lord almost always uses it in this sense, and because the following verse in Matthew's Gospel confines it thereto. John the Baptist neither wrought miracles, nor predicted future events to any such degree as many prophets that had arisen before him; consequently, the only point in which he was superior to them all, was his superior knowledge of Gospel mysteries, and if the least in the kingdom of God, the weakest true christian under the full light of the Gospel, be greater than John, it must be in the same sense, that is to say, he is acquainted with many things in the plan of salvation which were not revealed to John himself; and therefore, such a christian knows much more of these glorious things than the greatest Old Testament prophet. These scriptures will, I hope, satisfy you that I have not asserted too much. And if such be the furniture of the Christian Church, and of its weakest members—such their transcendent advantages beyond what was enjoyed under any former Dispensation—can it be true that they have not sufficient means for praising God, without having a liturgy composed for them in an extraordinary way; or without having recourse to that system of psalmody, which, in comparison of the discoveries and light of the Gospel, is but as the dusky twilight to the perfect day? Judge ye.

FOURTH. It is objected by some, that it is so difficult to attain sufficient skill in music, to sing in the manner I have pled for, that the bulk of each congregation will be prevented from joining in the public praise

(a) *Luke* 7, 28—(b) *Matt.* 11. 11, 12.

praise of God—that part of worship, must be committed to a select choir—and, we will become so fond of the music as to neglect the exercise of grace in the heart.

MY brethern, if any one of these things *necessarily* attended the mode I have recommended, I would give it up at once. But sure I am, this is not the case.—I well know that mankind are prone to extremes, as well on the one side, as on the other. This is actually the case with us now, and we have sunk to one extreme in our mode of performing this duty: for I can scarcely conceive in what more miserable manner we could perform it, supposing us to sing at all. And must we not attempt a reformation and seek to do right, for fear of running into the opposite extreme? It is always fallacious to reason against the *use* of any thing, from the *abuse* of it. That some may pay more attention to the music than to the frame of their heart, I readily grant, but surely the music is not the cause of this; on the contrary, as I have shewn, it is designed and calculated to aid and promote these gracious frames. We may also err by introducing such a variety of tunes into public worship, and in such quick succession, that the greatest part of the congregation cannot be acquainted with them. But it is easy to guard against this evil—there is no necessity for changing our airs every month, nor every year—Yea, and supposing us never to change them, yet this should not prevent us from singing, with *propriety*, those we do use. And I must farther maintain, that to learn to sing thus with propriety, neither requires uncommon talents, nor extraordinary pains—It is as easy, as the mode we use, provided we adopt the proper method of learning, and the teacher understands his business; and in this, I speak from certain knowledge. To sing, as I have mentioned, various parts must, indeed, be performed together:  
but

but it is not necessary that those who sing one part, should be able to sing the others—to that one, if they please, they may confine themselves in every tune—and it is as easy to learn one part as another. To some, indeed, this mode will be much easier than the present, when all are confined to one part: for as there is a variety in the parts suited to different voices, as they are fine or coarse, high or low, there is an opportunity of a choice according to the natural tone of the voice; in consequence of which, the performing of it will be more easy and pleasurable. And now, where is the extraordinary difficulty in all this? There is none.—Moreover experience and facts prove the practicability of it. I do not recollect that I ever heard a congregation, or even private family of Germans singing the praises of God, but they sung in concert, and made harmony.—Are we so dull and stupid that we cannot learn to do the same? I am sure, we are not. But the truth is, the prejudice of education, or the want of proper disposition to the duty lies at the bottom of the objection. Had we that delight in singing the praises of God, and that desire to qualify ourselves in the best manner for the performance of the duty, that many of us have in learning empty, silly songs, or other as unprofitable things, we would not make mountains of molehills; we would cheerfully devote some of that time to the acquisition of this skill, which many trifle away in such pursuits as will fill them with unutterable anguish when they are called to render their final account.

AND now, to conclude—Let every one receive, with reverence, the word of exhortation, and conscientiously apply himself to carry the Apostle's direction into practice. If you believe the Gospel to be divine, you will certainly own, that the treasures of it are incomparably superior to all the treasures of earth—that they will

will enrich and make you happy, when the other will vanish like an empty pageant, or amusing dream when one awaketh. Let us all exercise ourselves daily in learning more and more of the *word of Christ*, which is able to make us wise unto salvation, and to furnish us abundantly, through the influences of the Holy Spirit, for every word and work. Particularly, let us use it for our direction and edification, in singing the praises of our God and Saviour, as furnishing us with *matter* for the most exalted strains the church, on earth can raise. Let us be much employed in this delightful exercise—let the voice of praise be heard in our habitations, as well as in the church—and let us not grudge to spend a little time and pains to qualify ourselves for singing skillfully, with an harmonious noise.

LET us be ready to fall in with, and promote every attempt to improve our psalmody, in agreeableness to the *word of Christ*. If the principles I have laid down be true, certainly, our psalmody needs improvement. In this sentiment, I am not singular. Many pious, and enlightened christians have long wished for psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, more in the style, the spirit, and light of the Gospel, than the psalms framed for the Jewish dispensation. At length Dr. Watts arose, and gave the world an imitation of Davids psalms, in the language of the New Testament; as also a number of hymns, and spiritual songs, formed on other parts of scripture, especially, the Gospel. His performance was highly esteemed by many; and as much condemned by others; not, so far as I have learned, because there was any thing heterodox in it, but because the author had advanced, and attempted to bring into practice, the principles I have endeavoured to establish. His compositions, however, were soon used, in religious worship, public and private, by many christians as well of our own as of other denominations

tions; altho' the supreme judicatory of our church had not, as yet, given an exprefs sanction to them. At length our synod took up the matter judicially, and appointed a committee to examine the different versions of the book of psalms, to which they could have access, and from them to select such a collection as they should judge best; and to lay it before Synod, at a future meeting, for their consideration. In pursuance of this appointment, the committee proceeded on the business, and after a considerable time, reported, to this purpose, that having compared such versions as they could obtain, they did not apprehend any so well calculated for christian worship, as that of Dr. Watts, as amended by Mr. Barlow of New-England. The version, thus amended, was then laid before Synod for their consideration, who, after mature deliberation, gave it their judicial sanction, as you may see in a printed extract from their minutes bound up with the said version. The committee had also added a book of hymns to this version; but it was laid aside; not because Synod disapproved of the thing in itself, but because some parts of the collection appeared to them exceptionable. Very probably a collection of this kind will yet be added,—and, indeed, my brethren, so many are the peculiar and interesting discoveries of the Gospel—so many the passages which contain the most fit and excellent *matter* for christian praise, that, until we have hymns and spiritual songs formed upon them, I am clearly persuaded, and I trust, by this time, so are you, our psalmody will be *incomplete*.

IN the mean time, as we have the opportunity now, of advancing a considerable step in the improvement of our psalmody, let us chearfully and thankfully embrace it, and walk in the light and liberty wherewith our Divine Lord hath made us free, to the honour of his precious name, and our own greater edification. Let

us endeavour to divest ourselves of prejudice and prepossession—and give the version a fair and candid examination. This is surely the least that, in reason and conscience, you can do, whether you view the matter with regard to Synod, or to yourselves; for altho' Synod has not pretended to force this version on any congregation or individual, yet, methinks, some respect is due to the judgment of that *Body* to which we profess subjection in the Lord. And then, remember that you are deeply and personally interested in this matter, as accountable to God. For if, after you have been favoured with the clearest discoveries of the way of a sinners approach to God, and acceptance with him, you are found not walking according to the *Gospel*; and especially, if, after being warned and admonished, you obstinately reject, or carelessly neglect the opportunity of improving, you will not be able to answer for it to your final Judge.

IN examining the version now recommended, I hope you will keep in view the things you have now heard. But, above all, seek by earnest prayer, the direction of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to take of the things of Christ and shew them unto us,—that he would lead you in the path of duty—and teach you, and the whole church on earth, the truth as it is in Jesus.

AND now unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; unto him be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen. Yea, unto God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be undivided honours and eternal praises. *Amen.*

*F I N I S.*

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